Abstract: Senior student discusses their experience at Middlebury's encampment, feelings of belonging at the encampment, and relief at finding a space to discuss the violence in Gaza which they had not yet encountered at Middlebury. They also discuss their Jewish identity and extensive life experience in Zionist spaces as an important part of their encampment experience, both in how they felt held by the space and in what they felt they had to offer it. Discussion of challenge regarding decision making, surprise at encampment in the context of Middlebury's "sleepy" campus, feeling of "aliveness," and feeling in touch with Jewish identity as result of encampment participation as they "personally feel like the most Jewish thing you can do is resist oppression."

Q: To start, I'd love to hear about whatever comes to mind when someone asks you about your experience at the encampment.

A: To be honest people don't often ask me about my experience of the encampment. I wasn't super public you know on social media or anything about being part of it so really the people that know that I was part of it are people that were there or like knew me at the time. And it's – it was such an insane and unexpected experience that it's like hard to wrap my head around it. Because I'm someone that like – I have a lot of like anticipation anxiety. I think about things a lot in terms of planning them out, and so it was for me extremely sudden and so yeah I don't know it was just like a wild – kind of like going into a coma for nine days in that it was just like a sudden completely different reality than I was expecting, I guess.

Q: What was the first day like? How did you get there on the first day?

A: Yeah, that's my favorite part of the story to be honest. A key character in my experience of the encampment was my friend. Three or four days before the encampment, there was like a showcase of Palestinian culture at Wilson Hall, and I went there, and I was working the door, and my friends [names redacted] showed up, and it was kind of a trippy moment because I knew both of them through my friend who's pretty staunchly Zionist. And so apparently, we talked about it after the event, but they just assumed that I was also Zionist because they knew I was Jewish. And we'd never, we'd never talked about it, and we'd never been in a pro-Palestinian space before. So it was kind of like this, like, a meteor thrown into our friendship with, like, '*Oh, you don't think this way that I assumed that you'd been thinking*.'

And then I think, like the next day, or the day after, was Nocturne, and I walked around with those folks, and Nocturne was the day before the encampment started, and I was drunk, and I went home afterwards, and there was like this, like, die-in that we stopped by and watched for a while. And I went home, and I was super drunk, and it was Passover, and the only snack I had in the fridge was this jar of gefilte fish that was like so Zionist branded that, like there was, like a picture of Jerusalem that was, like, the whole wrapper of the jar. And so I sent [my friend] this picture of the jar, and I said, 'I'm so sorry. Like, this is all I have to eat. But I feel really guilty about it,' like as a joke. And then I go to sleep, and I wake up the next morning at like, at like 9:30, I check my phone, and he goes, 'haha, no worries.' … And then I'm gonna actually, can I find you the exact text?

[narrator finds the text]

Okay. After Nocturne, I texted him, being like, '*thanks for letting me tag along,'* and then I sent him a long text apologizing – I must have made a comment about the die-in, but I was just like, sort of saying, like, '*oh, we clearly have to navigate this new thing on our friendship*.' And then I sent him a picture of the gefilte fish, and I said, '*Good night from the insanely Zionist gefilte fish"*

10:20 am Sunday, April 28 the first day of the encampment, he goes, '*Haha. Also wanted you to know that I'm participating in the encampment. If you're interested in joining, we'd be happy to have you*.' And I just said '*Wait. I just woke up, there's an encampment?*' And he said, '*Yes, Mccullough Lawn,*' and I said, '*Holy crap. Yes, I'm coming*.'

And then I – in my pajamas, I walked like 10 minutes to get there, and I just sort of stood there and, like, absorbed what was happening. And I think, like, a few days beforehand, maybe me and someone else, like, had just been talking about how I didn't think an encampment was a possibility at our college or on our campus, because political engagement has been so low the entire time we've been here. Like, people really don't like talking and keeping those faces about like, the harsh realities of the world at this college, which is kind of funny, because it's like, people think it's super woke, and I think it is in some ways, but – sorry, I'm talking so much, I'm just gonna keep going–

Q: You're perfect.

A: But I was so confident that these kinds of things weren't possible. I think a lot of people felt that way too, that it's just like, such a sleepy campus, and we just had a semester with like, three student deaths, and people really didn't talk about that either. So it's like, you know, people don't talk about these things.

So yeah, I just went down in my pajamas, and I don't remember so much about the first day, but I was like, so like, confused and surprised, and it was way bigger than I was expecting. And I knew the second I was down there that I was gonna be part of it. But yeah, it was wild.

Q: Thank you. Okay, so many questions from what you just said. But I guess first off, your point about our campus typically kind of like taking a back seat on political matters, and so you were expecting that to go for this issue as well. Do you have a sense for what made activism for Palestine different?

A: Um, you mean, like, why the encampment was viable in the end? I think it was just that anyone was willing to do it. Was what made it different for people like I think a lot of people probably had been wondering if that was gonna happen, and wondering about how they would interact with it if it did, but nobody knew how to or, like, wanted to take the initiative to actually do it. My understanding is that it started between, like, a group of three or four people in an SJP (Students for Justice in Palestine) meeting being like, we should do this. I think they talked

about how they didn't have the numbers for their encampment, or like, it wasn't going to work, or was going to get shut down immediately. And then they realized that that wasn't a good excuse, or that didn't feel like a good excuse, you know, to not even try. And so that was why they did it. And they were definitely surprised by how many people were willing to be part of that immediately.

Q: Right. I'd love to hear about the morning when you wake up, you get that text, and your immediate thought is like: *you're coming*. What was behind that kind of immediate desire to go and do it?

A: Well, I think I immediately desired to go see it and to, like, see what was going on, because I was so surprised. I don't usually go outside in my pajamas, but I went in my pajamas and crocs, in like, you know, late April. What I sort of said at the time, what I think is probably true is that I had been deeply existential and stressed about what was happening in Israel since October 7, and certainly that felt like it was far more true for me than my peers or a lot of people around me at the time. Like I remember going up to [my friend] at a party in November, being like, *Iran's sending bombs!*, and we were like, at this social function, and we're both like, *I know, I don't know what to do or how to like…* you know, it was, it was so weird to like, just have to continue with normal.

Maybe what drew me to it, and the whole central message of why encampments were necessary is like, there can be no normal during a genocide. And operating as though things were normal had been so difficult. And I just had been so unwilling to like, externalize, because I didn't feel like there would be community there to like, sit with me, sit together through that. And the encampment was such a relief, because that was what that was. We were all unable to keep going on with normal so we all had this like community space, which was really healing in a lot of ways.

And maybe it was also because a lot of people, there were also people who had been touched by or knew the [Middlebury students] that had passed away in the last few months, which was also something that I was going through at the time in a pretty isolated manner. But yeah, that was sort of why it felt so necessary, or why I immediately wanted to be there. It was like *I don't have to just sit there and feel panicked about this on my own anymore*.

Q: Yeah. You talked earlier about the three student deaths of the previous semester and dealing with that on your own, or trying to, and I'm curious if you could say more about how that healing or grief was happening in the encampment space for you, and what you make of that?

A: Yeah, I don't know if that was like such a big thing. I think it was just more like me and [my friend] talked about Ev as the encampment, like, *would she be here?* A lot of people that were there were trans, or people who knew Ivan, and there was just so much rawness in that space, just because the nature of the encampment, that it also like, I think, felt like an open space to talk about things that you know, that it was harder to think about before. Bringing up Evelyn and random spaces was not easy, except at the encampment, it was easier. I don't know if it was

like that was an experience for many other people, but that was kind of how it felt for me. It was just so much grief between those deaths and what was happening in Gaza, and it just felt almost like a holding space for all of that, which was nice.

Q: Yeah. I'd love to know what kinds of conversations and activities you were participating in at the encampment, and what those meant to you?

A: What did I get involved in? I was pretty involved in the security. We had, like a security committee of people just keeping watch around the encampment to make sure it was safe, and checking for, like people taking pictures, and we had people who were doing a night watch.

I was also involved somewhat in the arts and crafts space, but mainly throughout and also after my role was– because I have more than the average exposure or experience to Zionism and to Israel and to this conversation and that kind of thing, I was kind of involved in, just like talking through these things a lot. A lot of people were very deeply involved in one specific thing, be it arts, education, the Board of Trustees stuff, and I wasn't really that specifically involved in any one thing, kind of overwhelmed a lot of the time.

Q: Could you say more about that role of talking through things, with your “exposure to Zionism” and stuff? Who were you talking to? Other Jews? non-Jews?

A: Yeah. I was just, like, trying to be aware of how certain groups were gonna react to things that were happening. But yeah, the Chabad Rabbi came around a few times, and I know him, so I would go up and chat to him. And there was one student who was very distressed by our presence, and spent a lot of time walking around the quad on the phone to various people yapping.

Oh God. There was one really tense moment where some of the other Jewish students in the encampment were like, *We need to make a list with photos of Jewish students or like people that we should be afraid of in this space*, and I was like, *No, we cannot make a list of people that we should be afraid of or aware of, because that is getting on their level.* Because that's what other people – other spaces do. So yeah, I guess trying to, like, maintain the level of understanding and non fear-based action from both angles, because it was so heated and so tense at times.

But also, I guess it's part of that anti-semitism piece of knowing that my presence and my involvement and actively having a voice in a room would like actively make it less viable for people to accuse us – or like for even us, you know, for us to do something – that was anti-semitic or could be perceived that way.

We had a big meeting the first or second day where we invited everyone on the campus to come and hear about why we were there and what we were doing. And a lot of people who didn't agree with us did show up. And I explained that I wasn't there because I felt super strongly about being “pro-Palestinian” or “anti-Israel” blah, blah, blah. But just because I am

opposed to the level of death that was happening in Gaza and that I felt it was necessary and totally acceptable to just be part of the encampment, even just purely because you can't tolerate the level of destruction and genocide that was happening, and that it doesn't have to be deeper than that.

I pushed back on this notion that you need to have a knowledge barrier to engage. My friend, who was quite Zionist, really felt like, *Oh, Why is this person here? He doesn't know anything about Israel*. And, well, I don't necessarily think you have to.

Q: That is a really interesting point, especially for opening it up. Another question, did you ever have doubt being there?

A: Doubt about, like, whether I should be there?

Q: Yeah, or about whether you wanted to be there?

A: No, I don't think so. Maybe a little bit on, like, the first couple of days, I was just like, t*his is insane*. But no, not really. No.

Q: I'm just thinking about my own experience with being Jewish, and having a Jewish family that has various levels of tolerance or relationship to Israel, and how that affects me working through my own relationship to everything we're talking about. I was looking at that through a lot of the time the lens of, like working through how I'm relating to and diverging from my family or community at home. I was off campus during the encampment, which is a big part of my interest right now. But I'm really curious about people whose backgrounds had a higher level of Zionist influence. And if you were ever hearing that voice in your head, or even if you didn't have doubt, maybe how you were working through and talking to that personal history and past learning and perspective that you've been engaged with?

A: Yeah, I think that the closest I can give to that is that I have had, and continue to have a very strong sense about one specific boundary, which is that a lot of this dialogue happens on social media. A lot of people's understanding of who is an activist who isn't an activist is like, who is posting the most on social media. Who's posting angry things, you know, that kind of thing. And I hadn't– I think exactly once since October 7th had I posted anything about it, and that was just after the Palestinian UVM student was shot in Burlington, I reposted a quote of his about how, like, how absurd it was that he was shot in the first place, which obviously it was, and I felt like that was pretty non controversial, and I just had like, at least three or four people coming into my DMs being like, *you're spreading the false information*, *blah, blah, blah, blah, blah*, like, angry, "self-hating Jew" rhetoric.

And I'm pretty conscious that I have a lot of people on my Instagram and social media who are very strong Zionists from my community back home. And I just don't think it's helpful for me and for a lot of people, honestly, to be posting these things, because it's not actual activism, really, it's just circulating stuff and making people upset.

And I said this a lot then, and I don't really remember exactly how I put it, but it was like, if the most vehemently Zionist people that know me know that I was part of the encampment and was part of this, they're going to use that to fuel their ideas that these spaces, make people anti-Semitic, or they're going to just put a label on as self-hating Jew. It's not going to encourage them to have a conversation. It's not going to do any of that. I just didn't think it was going to be helpful. So yeah, the one aspect of the community that most people were doing that I was not doing was just like, in any way being part of this publicly.

Q: I am curious about the role of social media in those nine days of the encampment, versus, the role of social media otherwise from October 7 to now, was there more posting, less posting?

A: Definitely more posting. We were posting virtually every day. Everything that happened with the administration we'd post, because they knew that it was a way to spread awareness, especially with, connecting with the alumni, with the letter that they got, and all that kind of stuff.

Q: I'm also interested in the difference between posting to spread awareness versus posting to identify yourself with the encampment. Because it sounds like that's what you were not doing, and if am I understanding right, that you are kind of in a minority of not doing that?

A: That's what I felt like a lot of the time. I don't know if it's true, but yeah, like the encampment was regularly asking people to repost things on their stories. And I made it very clear that I wasn't going to do that. It wasn't, like, secretly not doing it. I just didn't think it would be helpful to anyone.

Q: So it sounds like that boundary was respected.

A: Yeah. I mean, like, that would be a pretty unreasonable thing to be like, *you must post this on your Instagram story*, because some people just don't post on Instagram stories at all. But I definitely felt, I think, a bit of guilt that I, like I do post pretty regularly about other things. I just don't really like posting about politics. At all.

Q: You mentioned a conversation at the encampment among other Jewish students talking about potentially making a list of other Jewish students, but that didn't end up happening. But I'm curious. I'd love to hear about what it was like being at the encampment with other Jewish students, how those conversations were, what that was like.

A: It was great. Yeah, it was great. It would have been a very different experience had there not been so many Jewish people involved. That was very validating. It was great. It was tough to keep everyone regulated, and just even myself, with a level of, like, hostility, and …

Q: Okay. I'd love to hear more about what was so great about talking with other Jewish students?

A: It's hard to recall it in detail because it was such a dissociative experience, but yeah. It was really restorative. One of my Jewish friends who I had not talked to in a long time because I thought we disagreed [about Israel/Palestine] had had a full 360 like I had, and so that was really cool because he was about to graduate and we had this kind of "come to Jesus moment" together, and that was good, and affirming that other people had had experiences similar to those that I'd had of feeling one way and then through empathy and emotional reasons come to feel a different way.

Yeah, I think a lot of the conversations I had with other Jewish students – and there was a wide sector, and there were some Jewish students who had very staunchly and passionately and for a long time been involved in SJP, and then other Jewish students at the encampment who were just there because they cared about it. And there definitely was quite a bit of fear, or not even fear, but anxiety about whether the space was safe and welcoming for Jewish students or whether there was potential for anti-semitism, but I don't know. Israel/Palestine is such a phenomenon of a social conversation because everybody always feels like they don't know enough to have an opinion. Maybe even especially for Jewish people who grew up in these families where lots of people have different opinions. You just never feel like you're informed enough. And so a lot of conversations surrounded that kind of thing. People like *Yeah, I don't know, I don't feel like I know enough,* or *I grew up in a family that doesn't associate with Israel at all but I still feel like it pertains to me* because when you're publicly Jewish people often ask you about Israel even if it has nothing to do with you. That's just the experience. That's a huge piece of what a lot of people wrestle with with this thing: *Do I know enough? People expect me to have a position. I don't know if I do.* That kind of thing.

I wish I could give you more of a decisive answer of what it was like to be Jewish in the space, but I don't know. I personally feel like the most Jewish thing you can do is resist oppression. That's not something everyone has given a lot of thought or feeling too. But I personally see this genocide in line with the Holocaust as a genocide that is occuring, and therefore it is my duty to do whatever I can to oppose it. And that's something I think a lot of people feel to varying degrees. So it's really confusing when people tell you that you should feel the opposite because of that same reason.

Q: Yeah. You said something which resonated with me about the unspoken feeling that you have to have a lot of information in your head before you have an opinion. Do you think that's unique to this issue? Or is that part of a greater perfectionism/anxiety about political stances? You mentioned Middlebury as a sort of "apolitical" or "sleepy" campus. I wonder if that's part of why a lot of students here aren't outwardly political? Because of that fear of saying the wrong thing?

A: I definitely think that's part of it. This college has a huge perfectionism culture. Everyone seems to be so informed about everything. It seems that everyone knows more about everything than I do. But that's just not true. And yeah, I think that might be part of why that shows up here, but I think even in spaces that don't have a perfectionism culture people start with the pretext of *I don't know enough* or *I don't know everything* in almost every

Israel/Palestine conversation I've had. And I don't think it is the same for a lot of issues because I don't feel like I know everything about abortion, because how can you know everything about everything? But that doesn't feel like a barrier or an issue. But maybe that's because most people here do feel the same way about abortion. But I don't hear the prefix *I don't know enough* or *I haven't done enough reading* or whatever for people justifying not having an opinion on other issues. Maybe I'm wrong.

Q: What do you make of that?

A: This is an unformed thought, but I think something that makes talking about Israel really hard is that a lot of the reason that Israel exists and why people defend it relentlessly, even non-Jewish people, is the Holocaust. This absolutely unimaginable and astronomical thing that happened – the scope of which people can't wrap their heads around – and that is the emotional reason a lot of people use to justify Israel's right to exist. Which isn't the case for abortion or that kind of thing. So I think in the face of that people struggle to feel like they can have an opinion. They're like *I don't have any relatives who died in the Holocaust* or *I'm not Jewish, so why do I have the right to have an opinion on this?* I wonder if that's part of it. Also, as I'm saying it out loud, I think in a lot of really liberal spaces I've been in my whole life, like Middlebury but also other spaces, abortion and Gay Marriage and these things, probably like 95% of the people feel the same way. Whereas that's not the case with Israel. The left does not universally feel the same way. So maybe it's just that I haven't been in spaces where people disagree that much. The Holocaust – I think it's very compelling for people and very intimidating for other people in forming opinions.

My logic is, there is so much death happening, and I am opposed to it no matter what. I think even if these people do hate Jewish people, or hate me, or whatever, they don't deserve to die just because they feel that way. I think a lot of people would find that stance controversial, but they'd also probably struggle to say the opposite. There's this fear culture.

In the encampment there was a lot of conversation about "From the River to the Sea," which is a controversial chant for many reasons. So when myself and someone else brought up that, saying basically *This is upsetting people and stopping them from joining the conversation, a lot of people feel that it's antisemitic, other reasons* it was very black and white to them that a Palestinian Liberation Movement was incomplete without that chant. That chant was part of the history. My feelings on it were like, some people do use it in one way, but some people just mean liberation. But yeah- for them it was more like, SJP is a single goal movement. It's not invested in making it palatable.

Q: Did you feel that your perspective and history in Zionist spaces added something to the kinds of conversations going on at the encampment?

A: I think that sometimes there was pushback. I was invested in us being aware of the Zionist perspective in terms of trying to get us not to do something that might get us flamed, for lack of a better word. Not everybody was as concerned or interested in hearing that, not because they

don't care necessarily, but just because it didn't feel relevant to why they were doing it. We weren't trying to create dialogue, we were trying to change the situation, in terms of divestment and protesting what was happening in Israel. But I think that at Middlebury specifically, I never felt like I wasn't being listened to. It was just a question of whether what I was saying was relevant to other people. I think I felt that having conversations with other Zionist students was less of a thing that we had to do in the collective of SJP, and more like trying to see how this is affecting my own individual community and my relationship to that community outside this space. I said this many times and I'll say it many times again. But there's no doubt in my mind that had I felt that there was somebody in the movement at Middlebury who was anti-Semitic, I have no doubt that if I felt that way or that that person had a platform or was influencing the way things were going, that I would have immediately stepped out of that space and said something about it. And I never did.

Q: Okay. You said you were bringing your past experience in Zionist spaces in the sense that you were conscious of and speaking out about things that you thought might lead the encampment to be "flamed"? How did you see your involvement in the encampment as affecting your other communities? And also, when you say "your communities," do you mean specifically your Jewish communities?

A: Yeah. I think people who have a Zionist ideology and are staunchly Zionist – I think that is inherently and undeniably rooted in fear. A sort of paranoia that this thing that happened in the past cannot happen again, and that a Jewish state is necessary, because it becomes like *Look at what happens when we* don't *have a Jewish state. And look what could happen in the future.* And that is why people feel so strongly that we have to defend this and that kind of thing at any and every cost. And I think realizing that made me realize that it's very hard to get people who are in that fear to listen to you. So when I saw "flamed," I mean that if we said or did anything that made people think that we wanted to harm or get rid of the Jewish state in a complete sense that that would trigger a string fear reaction in people, and would make it very hard for those of us who were going into the Jewish community to have conversations to have them. Saying *I don't like the actions of the Israeli state* versus *I don't like the Israeli state* creates a different reaction. I'm not passing a judgement on either of those thoughts, but trying to find ways for Jewish people – for myself and other Jewish people – to actually have these conversations. It's very tough to do if people feel like a movement is opposed to them existing. And that is what it feels like for a lot of people. I don't know, I'm thinking through a lot of things.

Q: Yeah. What did engagement in your greater Jewish community after your involvement in the encampment look like?

A: It was pretty simple. It looked like keeping showing up. I kept going to Hillel. You know, Hillel as a space really didn't want to talk about these things, but yeah. My good Zionist friend and I kept talking about these things even though we really disagreed about them. And it was only possible because we already knew each other very well and she knows that I am not anti-Semitic and I don't wish harm on anyone. Standing by my actions and talking openly and talking through things. I think it's very important to assume that no one's wishing you bad and also not

writing anyone off because of how they feel, and that was definitely important. Assuming that people weren't going to do that to me, and not doing it to them. Which I'm not always perfect at.

Q: Right. So if the encampment was nine days long, I guess there was a Shabbat inside of those days.

A: Yeah! We did Shabbat. I don't remember it super well, but someone from JVP (Jewish Voice for Peace) came, there was a singing service, someone made Challah. Yeah. Shabbat was in some of the last few days of the encampment, and actually, we were in really critical conversations with the school, and some Jewish students were pushing to have a day where we weren't in these critical conversations. To have a Shabbat where we had peace and calm and chill and took care of ourselves because it was really very stressful for a lot of people. And that didn't happen because the school wanted to have a meeting on Saturday and it was critical, but yeah. There was a movement for us to have a proper Shabbat that was actually relaxing and restorative in the encampment space. But yeah, there was a cute little service in one of the big tents.

Q: Was the service all encampment people?

A: Yeah. Some people who were at the encampment during the days but not necessarily who slept there overnight. It wasn't necessarily all Jewish people. Also some people who actually weren't there much at all came for that. It was cute. It was good. It was wonderful. It was that Friday that Weybridge House had their feast at the encampment. Yeah, it was that Friday. So it felt like a really nice Shabbat dinner vibe. It was wicked. It was awesome.

Q: Yeah. What is the Weybridge Feast?

A: Weybridge Feast is a semesterly massive community meal that Weybridge house – the local foods house – puts on. A huge number of Weybridge people were involved with the encampment, so it only made sense to have it there. And it was super cool because some of the Afganistani girls who were there made food for Weybeidge feast. And a lot of other people who might not have otherwise been at Weybridge feast ended up being there. And it also meant that a lot of people who might not have been otherwise at the encampment came. It was beautiful. It was sunny, there were so many people. It was awesome. There was a massive table of food, and so many people came out and heard about what we were doing and sat down and ate. It was this beautiful community moment. God I would do it again in a heartbeat. And after such a stressful, stressful week there was this feeling of break, like we were making flower crowns and that kind of thing.

Q: It sounds amazing. Yeah- the stress of the encampment. What were the big stressors for you? And what were some other moments of community rest and joy and togetherness?

A: There was a lot of compounding stress. That it existed at all was stressful. Then also like, remember during COVID when everybody thought it was going to be just 2 weeks? It was like

that– We were like *We'll be gone by Tuesday! This'll just be a 3 day thing, either the school will wipe us or immediately bend, everything will be great*. Nobody thought it was going to last 9 days! Especially because we were sitting there hearing about other schools, about Dartmouth. I think the stress came from that, a lack of sleep, sleeping outside, but also being in meetings constantly. Trying to talk about how to strategically continue and trying to be strategic but also listen to everyone and be democratic and that kind of thing. I want to tell one part of the story that I frequently refer to as "The Day that Democracy Died." It was the stress of meeting with the school, having all this pressure, we all of a sudden had this huge sense of purpose that was existing. I don't even know why it was so stressful, it was just a wild time. We had these huge goals and we were saying we weren't going to go away until those goals were met, and we were trying to keep people there, keep people engaged, keep people safe, keep ourselves safe. There were all these things. Like Facilities really wanted us to move the tents because they were killing the grass, and a lot of people didn't want to move them because that would mean bending to the school, but other people felt we didn;t want to put more work on facilities, and so like 9 million massive conversations at once, and then also trying to juggle this massive goal that we had, and then also feeling that those goals were impossible, but also that we could not do anything until these goals were 100% met. Which obviously didn't happen.

I don't even know why it was so stressful. It just was. Lots of people were not fully taking care of themselves, and that for me was stressful. And the constant uncertainty of what was going to happen next. But it was also during the semester so we still had classes, people were graduating, you had to think about the future! A lot of people weren't going to class. I wasn't really going to class. It was finals season, everything was happening simultaneously.

Also, we were in the middle of our school campus. Which is a crazy place to live for nine days. Everytime I walk past that part of the quad I'm like *I literally ate, slept, shat – did everything there.*

Q: Wait– was there a portapotty?

A: No. We pooped in buildings. We just went into buildings. I woke up every morning at 7am, walked into Munroe Hall, ast the students who were studying and looking very clean, and I was NOT looking clean, and I'd go and poop, brush my teeth, and leave the building.

Yeah- it was definitely very stressful. It's hard to pinpoint why. Probably because of millions of tiny things.

Q: It sounds pretty electric, too.

A: Yeah. The most alive I've felt in a long time. It was awesome. That's the thing– it was the best of times and the worst of times, truly in every sense of the word. It was crazy.

Q: Could you say more about how you felt alive?

A: Yeah. It was partly what I said earlier, about how this thing that I had been going through and thinking about alone since October 7th– suddenly having community about that, and my entire life focusing on that for a period of time. Maybe it was also being outside 24/7– I had never camped before! I'd never been camping before. I'd slept in a tent maybe for one night once a long, long time ago. So being outside at all times, being around people at all times, being in community at all times, and meeting so many new people at once at all times. Feeling passionate about something and living that passion. Living it in community. A lot of us had this conversation like "this must be what it's like to live in a commune! This is awesome!"

Which also felt kind of wrong. To be enjoying it felt wrong. A lot of us talked about this. But ultimately it was a very, very rich and rewarding experience. It was wild.

Q: Could you say more about why it felt wrong to enjoy it?

A: I mean, we were protesting a genocide. And this insane privilege that we had to be at a school where Pub Safe literally installed protectors for our cables so we could have power in the encampment. Versus less than three hours away at Dartmouth, within 24-hours the police raided and destroyed the entire space. And most schools across the country faced so much oppression from the institutions. We talked about escalating our actions with the awareness that the school probably wouldn't do anything. There were no police. There was nothing. The worst we had was some drunk freshman running through our encampment on the weekend. Yeah- it was definitely weird being out there on a friday or saturday night. But nothing – so there was this sort of guilt of knowing we had the privilege to enjoy it. We had the privilege to not fear the cops coming. Yeah.

Q: Do you think you guys acted differently because you didn't have that fear?

A: Definitely. Without doubt. We probably had any more time to have very, very long meetings and conversations, and to take our time with our actions, because we weren't facing that pressure. And because the school seemed like it was willing to have conversations and negotiate, which isn't what I think a lot of other schools experienced. Yeah- I think it was probably a very different experience because of that. I think at first we thought it was possible that we might have police or have an issue, but I think it became very clear after a few days that it wasn't going to happen. But we had structures at the encampment just in case it did.

One system we had was, if you weren't an international student, you were meant to put your tent on the outside of the encampment, and if you were an international student you should be in the middle of the encampment because if the police did come, the students inside could flee. We had a system, you were Red, Yellow, or Green. Reds were people who would stay if the police came. Greens were people who would leave if the police came, or who weren't even staying at the encampment. And Yellows were people who were staying at the encampment but would leave if the police came. So we had structures and were prepared for that situation, but it never happened.

Q: Could you tell me about the end of the encampment? The last few days, cleaning up.

A: It was crazy. Crazy. Well, there was the “Day that Democracy Died.” So the school told us there was an ultimatum. They said *Here’s what we are willing to do,* (they were going to release a statement to the public) *and they would only release the statement to the public if we agreed and started to clear out.* And so we had this huge conversation among the smaller strategy committee and then among the larger encampment as a whole about whether or not we could take this agreement. And whether we could clear out.

Basically how it ended up after many hours of going back and forth on this crazy day– well actually, I’m going to go into detail. So we had a strategy meeting about whether we were agreeing to take this agreement to the camp and vote about whether to disband the camp. We thought, if we take it to them, they’re probably going to vote to disband. So we [the strategy committee] all voted and agreed, initially, that we would take it to vote, and that we’d achieved something. And then one of our members was like *Everyone let's go outside and touch some grass!* And it was so emotional, there was so much need for catharsis., that we all ended up standing in a circle and singing this song that was like *You don’t walk alone* or something, and you name someone and sing about them not walking alone. And it was beautiful, and then several of them went back into the meeting, but I went to go lead this workshop session in the encampment about answering questions about having had a Zionist experience [growing up], and adding insight about what that was like. So I did that, led it, and it was great. But I noticed that several people who told me they were going to come who were part of the [strategy] committee were not there. So I knew something was up. So I went back to the room where we were meeting, and people were yelling and crying, and not in a good way.

Basically one individual said they didn’t think the school’s offer was good enough, and they decided we should take it to the whole encampment, not just us. It was the evening at this point, and everyone in the encampment was sitting in a huddle, and there were speeches, a whole line of people who wanted to give different speeches about different things. And we were voting on whether or not we should take the school’s agreement. We were like, *We have to vote now.* It was dark at this point, it was late. I was one of the people who was counting the people who were voting. Basically we had people line up on each side, whether they thought we should take the agreement or we shouldn’t. And so I had to go count the people on one side, and someone else was counting them on the other side. And so before we voted, I was like *Okay guys, do we agree that we’re going to take the rest of this vote no matter what?* And everyone was like *Yes.* So I go and count and I think it was like 47-36. 47 people said yes, we should take the agreement and take down the encampment. We’re done. 36 people said otherwise. Then there was this long moment of silence and confusion and panic noises, because it was like *We agreed to do this but now people don’t feel so sure about it*, and also 36 is a lot of people who didn't feel that way. And a lot of people who were Middle Eastern or North African minorities– most of them didn’t feel like we should take the agreement. And actually, I don't remember, that might’ve been a vote about whether we should take a vote on the agreement tonight. So by the end of that a lot of people were like *it’s too late in the day, we can’t do this tonight.* And just gave up and went to sleep. And then the next day we voted. But the reason I say it was the day

democracy died was that we were like *Okay, however this vote goes we're going to do it.* But then this interesting question about representative democracy came up. Like, *if people who this issue affects are in the minority group, do they have more of a say in what we do?* And it's a HUGE question that I really don't have an answer to. But that was the day when I was like, *huh– sometimes democracy doesn't work. This isn't working.* Which was crazy. But yeah, the next day we voted again. We agreed. There was this anticipation waiting for the school to release a statement. And I actually have a video of an encampment leader reading the statement to the encampment on the day we took it down.

But the day we took it down, this awful thing happened. And by this time a lot of us were going back to classes, so there weren't that many of us there when this happened. But yeah, someone read the statement aloud in the communal tent. And we were all just sitting there, and you could feel the vibe and the energy in the room was just bad. Because basically it was very mediocre. We were expecting something big and radical, but the statement was very mediocre and they did not explicitly name a lot of things we needed them to name. It was not what people were expecting at all. So it felt like we'd lost. Not completely, but like we'd been cheated out of what we had hoped for. And it was really depressing. And it made a lot of people very sad. And a lot of people were very angry. And then we had to take down the encampment anyway because we said that we should do it. And it was this huge logistical operation because we;d borrowed gear room tents, so we had to get them back to the gear room. Blah blah. A huge operation. And there definitely was a very strange sense of emptiness that I felt and I think a lot of people felt that day, losing this intense community. Because we were all still a part of it, but we weren't there anymore, and that was just a very different thing. Yeah. I went up the Voter building staircase, and I took these videos of the evening after we'd left [they show me a video of the grass where the encampment had been set up, dead in rectangles where tents had been]. It was just wild to see everything gone.

So then it was late May, and life continued. We started talking about what we were going to do at graduation. Then the Board of Trustees Action happened and they agreed not to vote. It sucked because a lot of people had lost the energy, lost the momentum. We had said *Oh if they don't do what we ask, we're going to put the tents back up.* But we couldn't because it was the end of the semester. That was not fun.

Q: Yeah. It makes sense that that ending, especially in a way you're not satisfied with, and it sounds like it was hard to know what to do next. How to keep the momentum going. Did you guys debrief much? Have there been moments when you've felt sparks of that thing that was at the encampment since?

A: No. The weeks after that there was some momentum, and those of us who were really involved in the space were still there, but a lot of those who weren't were not. For very valid reasons such as the semester ending. But, no, it's never felt like that again, really. It's so different just going to SJP meetings than being in that space. Even just talking about it now over the last hour I can remember how it felt. And it hasn't– not in a bad way, necessarily, like we

can’t have an encampment all the time, but being in a physical community around an issue is very different to being in a time-based time space where you talk about that issue.

Because the encampment was my first real involvement with SJP, it feels very different. I guess it's different when everyone around you is prioritizing this thing over everything else, but generally people are not. Which is valid. But it's definitely a very different feeling. But what’s also true is that since that moment [of the encampment] I have not felt isolated in caring about [Israel/Palestine]. Not caring about it, that's’ not the right word– having that rock in your chest because there's this horrible thing happening and you don’t know where to talk about it– no I do. Now I have spaces and ways and people, and that’s great.

Q: Yeah. You talked about the encampment as an important space for community care. I’d love to hear more about that – maybe a specific instance.

A: There are several moments. It was like having a friend group afterwards. We had a lot of meals together afterwards and sort of learn how to be friends outside that space. I feel like the feast was a big one. There were a lot of small sweet moments. WOMP [Wednesday Open Mic Night] happened at the encampment that week, which was crazy! For a lot of people that was a huge moment.